

man at the same time, and not easily brought together again, since many museums and friends sent me whole collections and single specimens for study, in addition to the wonderful material in the Tring-Museum, the results of many years of labour and expense. I do not think that such intricate questions can be criticized and declared to be "apparently unsatisfactory," unless the critic himself has devoted months of study to the subject.

Whether my work is inferior to that of my friend Hellmayr will soon become apparent, because the latter author will before long publish a new review of the Paridæ of the world, and I am in the happy position to predict that Mr. Hellmayr will adopt practically all my alterations. In fact I have discussed many questions with him and we have finally agreed in all of them.

I have of course no objection to my kind critic's different views on certain points—in fact science is often benefited by the ventilation of various views—but I do object to the statement that there are "certain eccentricities" in my book. It is quite possible and even probable that certain of my conclusions are erroneous, for every human being makes mistakes sometimes, but my conclusions are not jumped at without critical studies, they are not combinations of "happy ideas" or the dangerous outbursts of a "brilliant mind"—but they are the logical results of careful and painstaking investigations. They may be, as I have said, erroneous in certain cases, but they are not "eccentricities," and a perusal of my book should reveal this to every ornithologist.

ERNST HARTERT.

### Subgenera, and Other Matters.

WHILE Dr. Hartert is not alone in considering that subgenera "are unnecessary and undesirable," sympathizers with this view, taking naturalists at large, are apparently few and far between, judging by their works. In faunistic papers and in ordinary references to species, subgenera are preferably ignored, even by those who believe they subserve a useful purpose. In works of a classificatory character, as monographs, manuals, and systematic treatises on the birds of a large area or of particular countries, they should be no more omitted than the higher groups, since their use in the case of a large genus serves to indicate the relative degree of relationship of its different members.

To subdivide such genera into minor groups, and label them A, B, C, etc., or by some non-technical designation, as 'Blue' or 'Green,' in lieu of giving them a name by which they can be easily referred to as groups, only half meets the requirements of the case; it is only an ineffectual attempt to 'beat the devil round the bush.'

There is, and doubtless always will be, great diversity of opinion as to the proper limits of genera. Dr. Hartert, for example, is exceedingly con-

servative, and is satisfied often to combine into one genus a number of groups that many, possibly most, other ornithologists would keep apart as good genera; and even in other less heterogeneous groups, they would sometimes consider it desirable in classification to recognize certain subdivisions by name as subgenera. Even to drop subgeneric names from species designations would come far from bringing nomenclature to the standard adopted in 'Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna.'

As Dr. Hartert admits his "very strong tendency to combine allied forms as subspecies," it is perhaps not fair to criticise his conclusions without equal opportunity to go over the ground; yet one's experience in similar lines of research is apt to give an impression of the probabilities in such matters.

Perhaps the term "eccentricities" is rather too severe to apply to any features of the great work now under mention. But there is one point that, to say the least, seems a little extraordinary, namely, the disregard of the rule adopted by all codes, from the first 'B. A. Code' to date, that adjectival specific names must agree in gender with the generic name with which they are associated. For one author to rebel against such a general consensus of opinion, even on the plea of conserving stability in nomenclature, is to introduce a jarring element not at all conducive to either harmony or uniformity. From Linné down to the last International Code, generic names have been construed as substantives in the nominative singular, with which it has been universally ruled that adjectival specific names must agree in gender. Dr. Hartert's rebellion against this rule may be considered as approaching 'eccentricity'; at least this is one of the points I had in mind in using this, perhaps rather unfortunate, term.

Closely akin to this is the retention of names etymologically the same, if differing in orthography by a single letter, dependent even upon gender. But, 'more's the pity,' my friend Hartert is not the only aggressor in this matter, which is likely to become, or perhaps is already, the most serious bone of contention in nomenclatorial questions. We had hoped for his influence on the side of stability, and therefore feel deeply grieved that he should have espoused a principle, which, if even partially adopted — for we cannot expect a general stampede to an innovation so subversive of long accepted rules of nomenclature — will do more to upset stability than any other conceivable practice.

Again, since the promulgation of the British Association Code of Nomenclature in 1846, Brisson's genera have been almost universally accepted as tenable. Possibly a few authors during the last fifty years have declined to recognize them, but they have been very few in comparison with those who have been willing to follow in this matter the ruling of the 'B. A. Code.' When therefore the author of 'Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna' declines to accept Brisson's genera, and makes bold to state that in his opinion they are not genera at all, such action seems to come very near the border line of 'eccentricity.'

For more than half a century zoölogists have recognized the importance

of mutual agreement in respect to nomenclatorial rules, and repeated efforts have been made to prepare codes that should be so reasonable in their provisions as to meet the approval of at least the majority of zoölogists. The most important move in this direction was the appointment, some years since, by the International Zoölogical Congress of a representative committee to study the already existing codes and, on the basis of this examination, to formulate a code of rules that should meet as nearly as possible, in the estimation of the committee, the requirements of modern zoölogical nomenclature, this code to receive the endorsement of the International Zoölogical Congress, and thus carry with it the influence and approval of a representative international body of zoölogists. While such a code, of course, would not be mandatory, the solicitude of all working zoölogists to secure uniformity of usage in matters of nomenclature would naturally tend to the waiving of personal preferences and prejudices for the sake of stability and uniformity in nomenclature.

A code of nomenclatorial rules must necessarily be to some degree arbitrary in its fundamental principles, and a compromise in respect to many important details. Most of us have strong opinions and preferences on many points, but in case they should run counter to the rulings of a representative international committee one should consider that loyalty to the best interest of science in so important a matter as uniformity and stability in nomenclature would render it laudable for one to contribute his mite in securing such desirable ends by waiving his preferences and accepting what such a body of naturalists had decided was for the general good. To do otherwise would be to assume the rôle of an obstructionist, whose 'eccentricities' in nomenclatorial matters it would be proper for other zoölogists to ignore.

Thus it is a matter of serious regret that Dr. Sharpe, in his 'Hand-List of the Genera and Species of Birds,' should have persisted in taking Linnæus at 1766 instead of 1758 as the starting point of binomial nomenclature, thus putting the work seriously out of touch with present tendencies and usage, to the inconvenience of the great majority of workers in the same field. The placing, in the same work, of species and subspecies, on the same basis as regards nomenclature is also a most inconvenient and unscientific archaism, not to say 'eccentricity,' greatly to be regretted. It is individualism of this sort that is retarding uniformity and stability in nomenclature.

For many years we have been an admirer of Dr. Hartert's careful work and advanced methods, and have often had the pleasure, as a reviewer, of commending his works and papers. Some twenty years ago the A. O. U. published a 'Code of Nomenclature,' which introduced a number of innovations, among them the adoption of the 10th edition of the 'Systema Nature Linnæi' as the starting point of binomial nomenclature, the adoption of trinomials for subspecies, and the non-ennation of names. They each encountered for a time much opposition, but in recent years all have found their way into nearly all of the modern codes of nomenclature, in-

cluding the latest draft of the International Code. Among the first European ornithologists to accept the more important of these innovations, and to show a just appreciation of the principle of subspecies and trinomialism, was the author of 'Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna'; and it is therefore all the more to be regretted that he has gone so far beyond the original intention of the non-emendation principle as to make it a menace rather than an aid to stability in nomenclature.

J. A. ALLEN.

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### NOTES AND NEWS.

AT THE last Congress of the A. O. U., held in New York City November 13-16, 1905, the Union authorized the Committee on the Nomenclature and Classification of North American Birds to prepare a new edition of the A. O. U. Check-List, with a view to its early publication. As the nomenclature of the Check-List was based on the A. O. U. Code, published twenty years ago, it was also deemed advisable to make a critical examination of the Code, with a view to amending some of its provisions, to make it meet more fully the present requirements of zoölogical nomenclature. In order to make such a revision available for use in the preparation of the new edition of the Check-List, a special committee was appointed to take up the matter with as little delay as possible, its report to be submitted to a meeting of the Council to be called specially to act upon it. The Committee appointed on the revision of the Code consists of the following: J. A. Allen (chairman), Theodore Gill, Henry W. Henshaw, Harry C. Oberholser, Wilfrid H. Osgood, Charles W. Richmond, Witmer Stone. Within a few days after the adjournment of the Congress the Committee on the Code was called to meet in Washington on Dec. 11, 1905. A four day's session was held, beginning on this date, at which all of the members were present. Several important and a considerable number of minor changes were adopted, nearly all unanimously and the others with only one or two (in one case only) dissenting votes. It is expected that a special meeting of the Council will be held in Washington about the middle of January, to receive and act upon the report of the Code Committee. A meeting of the Nomenclature Committee will immediately follow, to begin work upon the new edition of the Check-List.

In this connection it may be safe to premise that probably the forthcoming third edition of the 'Check-List' will be quite different from either of its predecessors. In these days of rapid progress in zoölogical research, twenty years is a long period, and while the classification adopted in the